



Plants for Children's Play Spaces in Early Years

In early years services, when planting trees, shrubs and ground covers, there are considerations to take into account for children's welfare.

Plants and trees in outdoor play spaces need to fulfil certain attributes: shade provision, hardiness, low allergy effects, pleasant textural attributes and low or no toxicity. From a sustainability perspective it's also important to consider the water requirements of plants and their ability to provide habitat for/attract native birds and bees. Additionally, some plants may provide the bonus of being able to be used in edible gardens, which children can plant, care for and compost leftovers from. See the bush tucker section below for more information.

Resources Used:

The Asthma Foundation has produced a guide on creating a [low allergen garden](#) for children and Kids Safe WA has [fact sheets on poisonous plants](#) to avoid for young children and they now have produced a book '[Plants for Play Spaces](#)' which has useful suggestions for early years to include and organised in regional sections of WA. To be even more locally WA specific, the Water Corporation has a link to help you select [waterwise plants](#) for your areas while [Grow me Safely](#) is another quick reference online guide created by Kidsafe NSW, so although not WA specific, it is visual and best used for cross referencing. Finally all information has been checked by the Community Liaison Landcare Officer, Cat Williams at [SERCUL](#) to ensure that it is as relevant as possible for use in WA early years services.

This Little Green Steps WA plant information below acknowledges the use of information from all of these guides above to create a beginner guide to non-toxic planting in kids play spaces in the temperate regions of WA. Each plant suggestion also includes one interesting characteristic to share with early years.

Waterwise Trees which will tolerate full sun. These are also great shade trees over 5 metres.

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| 1. Weeping Peppermint – <i>Agonis Flexuosa</i> | low weeping branches |
| 2. Swamp Sheoak – <i>Casuarina Obesa</i> | Interesting Seed pods |



Waterwise Smaller Native Trees – under 5 metres.

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| 1. Red flowering Gum – <i>Corymbia ficifolia</i> | Red flowers in summer & attract butterflies |
| 2. Coral Gum – <i>Eucalyptus torquata</i> | Pink flowers |
| 3. Red-capped Gum - <i>Eucalyptus erythrocorys</i> | 'Illyarrie' in Noongar, red caps & yellow flowers |

Waterwise, 1 metre high native shrubs, can be planted in full sun.

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| 1. Native hibiscus – <i>Alyogyne huegelii</i> | SW coastal scrub with large purple flowers |
| 2. <i>Eremophila maculata</i> | 'Spotted emu bush' red and yellow varieties and bird attracting |
| 3. <i>Westringia dampieri</i> | Can be pruned to hedge, white/mauve flowers |

Waterwise low native shrubs, can be planted in full sun.

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| 1. Couch Honeypot – <i>Banksia dallaneyi</i> | Interesting leaf texture and yellow flowers. |
| 2. Swan River myrtle – <i>Hypocalymma robustum</i> | Pink flower spires |
| 3. Coastal Daisy – <i>Olearia "Little smokie"</i> | Silver foliage & drought tolerant |

Waterwise native groundcovers, can be planted in full sun.

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| 1. <i>Adenanthos cuneatus</i> | Coral jug flower and honey eater attracting. |
| 2. <i>Eremophila "Kalbarri carpet"</i> | Red flower and bird attracting |
| 3. <i>Scaevola aemula</i> | Mauve fairy fan flower |

Waterwise native coastal plants & climbers.

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| 1. Native wisteria – <i>Hardenbergia comptoniana</i> | Purple climber flowers in winter |
| 2. Knotted club rush – <i>Ficinia nodosa</i> | Quick growing, round seed heads |
| 3. Saltbush – <i>Atriplex cinerea</i> | Silver foliage, edible salty leaves |



Waterwise strap-leaved plants, can be grown in full sun.

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| 1. Kangaroo Paw – <i>Anigozanthos manglesii</i> | Bird attracting, WA emblem and called ‘Kurulbrang’ in Noongar |
| 2. Grey Cottonheads – <i>Conostylis candicans</i> | yellow flowers, grey foliage |
| 3. Purple Flag - <i>Patersonia occidentalis</i> | purple flower attracts blue banded (stingless) bee |

Waterwise Native WA butterfly attracting species.

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| 1. Running Postman - <i>Kennedia prostrata</i> | Pea Blue Butterfly |
| 2. Chenille Honeymyrtle - <i>Melaleuca huegelii</i> | Klugs Xenica, Australian painted lady |
| 3. Stinkwood – <i>Jacksonia sternbergiana</i> | Attracts the Pea Blue, Fringed Blue and Western Jewel Butterfly |

Waterwise, Native WA Bird attractors.

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| 1. Woolly Bush - <i>Adenanthos sericeus</i> | Soft foliage and red single flowers |
| 2. Tar Bush - <i>Eremophila glabra</i> | Honey eaters love the orange/red flowers |
| 3. One sided bottle brush – <i>Calothamnus quadrifidus</i> | Birds love the red flowers, not an irritant like <i>Grevillea</i> can be |

Native WA Bush tucker plants/trees - Warning – Do not prepare Bush Tucker food without being shown by experienced and Indigenous peoples.

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| 1. Quandong (Native peach) – <i>Santalum acuminatum</i> | Local to Perth environs |
| 2. Murin murin – currant bush – <i>Scaevola spinescens</i> | Medicine tea, hard to source, found in drier WA |
| 3. Ruby saltbush - <i>Enchylaena tomentosa</i> | Soft foliage, ground cover with edible fruits. |
| 4. Gotu Kola - <i>Centella Asiatica</i> | Native to WA – leaves blanched and eaten, cultivated easily |
| 5. Acorn Banksia - <i>Banksia prionotes</i> | Grows fast and is easily available
Flowers soaked in water = sweet drink. |